



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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#### FIRST "R" MONTH BEGINS NEW FALL OYSTER SEASON

Calling attention to the nation-wide opening of the oyster season today, the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior, points out that the oyster industry is one of America's oldest and most valuable fishery resources.

For more than 900 years, the Service says, a quaint ritual has opened the Colne Oyster Fishery at Colchester, England. Even in this country, where such elaborate ceremonies are not customary, pedigreed Long Island "Blue Points," fresh dredged from their New York beds, are presented annually to the White House for the President's dinner table. In other important oyster-producing communities the new season is ushered in by various local observances.

The popularity of oysters dates back more than 2,000 years. Oyster culture was practiced before the days of Christ. Early Roman aristocrats set up salt-water tanks in their villas in which to hold oysters fresh for their tables. The terms used to describe oysters best illustrate the esteem in which they were held. To the Greeks oysters were "the perfect prelude to a meal," and to the Romans "the dainty manna of the sea."

Long before the earliest American colonization, the Indians had discovered the merits of the oyster as an important sea food. This is attested by the huge mounds of oyster shells, often called "kitchen middens," found along the seaboard in our eastern States. One such mound along the Damariscotta River in Maine is said to contain about 7,000,000 bushels of shells.

#### Range of Distribution and Methods of Capture

Oysters are the most widely distributed seafood taken from our waters. They are found in the salt and brackish waters of every State along the Atlantic Coast from Massachusetts to Texas, inclusive, and in Washington, Oregon, and California, along the Pacific Coast.

Chesapeake Bay produces more oysters than any other body of water in the world. Virginia and Maryland, within whose borders Chesapeake Bay is embraced, led United States production in 1939 with 36,847,000 pounds, valued at \$2,726,000. The South Atlantic and Gulf area accounted for 27,703,000 pounds, worth \$1,441,000, while the Middle Atlantic region produced 11,653,000 pounds, at \$1,778,000. Total United States production for that year amounted to 93,006,000 pounds, or 46,503 tons, worth \$8,190,000 to the oystermen.

This shellfish is harvested by means of hand-operated scissor-like tongs, and with dredges which are dragged over the bottom. After capture the oysters are delivered to the shucking plant where they are opened, the meats extracted, washed, and graded as to size, then placed in cans. These cans are packed in boxes and barrels with crushed ice and rushed to market by refrigerated express. The great bulk of the oysters harvested are marketed as shucked fresh oyster meats.

In many communities the oyster industry is the principal source of livelihood for the people. About 60,000 are gainfully employed as fishermen, oyster shuckers, packers, and in other allied jobs.

#### Industry Aided by Research

Many practices in oyster cultivation, harvest, and preparation used by the industry are the result of suggestions based on studies made by Service biologists and technologists.

As a result of an investigation conducted on the Pacific Coast by a Service scientist, the methods of cultivating the Olympia oyster were revolutionized and successfully adopted by oystermen.

In cooperation with the Connecticut Shellfish Commission, the staff of the Service's station at Milford, Conn., keeps oyster growers of Long Island Sound well informed regarding the time of spawning and expected time of setting of oysters. This permits growers to prepare their beds with fresh "clutch" to catch the new setting.

Control of starfish is the principal problem to confront oyster culturists of New England. This enemy attaches itself to the lip of the oyster, exerts pressure on the shell with its suckers, and secretes a fluid which narcotizes the oyster. From then on it is a simple step to devour the meat. Mechanical and chemical methods of extermination developed by the Service aid the oystermen to combat this costly pest.

Recent investigations on the narcotizing effect of sulphate pulp-mill waste on oysters have developed methods by which Southern pulp manufacturers can render these wastes harmless which discharge into tidal waters.

In South Carolina experimental oyster farming is being carried on to improve the quality of oysters used in canning. Additional areas of this type will soon be established in North Carolina and possibly in Florida.

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